

## HISTORY - CHAPTER 3

### EARLY 18<sup>TH</sup> THROUGH 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

#### PROF JOANNE PASSET

(**Abstract:** 19<sup>th</sup> C, westward expansion, economic integration, the rise of regional tensions the issue of slavery, religious revival and moral awakening, the Underground Railroad, the Civil War and Reconstruction, industrialization, the end of the frontier, and a new imperative: from isolationism to internationalism. )

PROF PASSET: Today we're going to continue to talk of American history this time focusing on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yesterday when I left off I was talking about Thomas Jefferson and his interest in decentralised government and the nation of farmers, heavily linking land ownership and citizenship. During his Presidency - two terms, which lasted from 1800 to 1808 - Jefferson shifted gradually away from a commitment to decentralized government and agrarianism and strict construction of the constitution, in favor of nationalism. This trend would continue under his successors, Presidents Madison and Monroe.

Americans in this period looked progressively westwards. With that expansion westwards came increasing conflict with Native Americans who were already on that soil.

The US went to war with Great Britain in 1812; a war that gets very little coverage in American history courses in high school. This was a war that we fought with Britain mainly because Britain was engaged in war with France and we wanted to trade with both France and Britain equally. Britain was interfering with our ability to trade freely, and sometimes this war is referred to as the second war for independence.

1812 brought a number of interesting developments in the United States. For one thing, Americans started to manufacture more domestic goods, especially textiles. England was very careful about guarding its industrial secrets. Men who worked in those factories would sometimes try to memorise how the machines were constructed and then sneak those plans out of the country but England guarded them very carefully in order to discourage competition for textiles. Samuel Slater successfully got the technology out and America's textile industry developed in New England. After the war of 1812, it just boomed, increasing demand for cotton. Cotton, of course, came from the south, which saw increasing demand for slaves and more land. This demand is one of the ingredients leading to civil war by 1860. To meet this demand, westward expansion and increased manpower and womanpower would be needed. Further fueling this demand for cotton cultivation, processing of cotton was made easier with Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin, which removed the seeds from the cotton more efficiently than by hand.

Congress, meanwhile, supported the creation of a national market economy which, before then, didn't exist. Without a national bank and a stable, consistent currency, many people, including small farmers and small merchants in particular, did not want to conduct business with anyone they could not see.

After the war of 1812, factors change. America developed a transportation network that began to link the country east to west as well as north to south. A strong currency emerged and a national bank eventually developed. All of this helped link the nation, and a mass culture was made possible.

Regional rivalries and tensions. After the war of 1812, demand for goods fell in Europe, contributing to a 6 year economic depression in the United States. The economic woes then contributed to political sectionalism and regional tensions. Most regions' political interests were governed by their regional interests. For example, the citizens in the more industrial areas wanted protective tariffs because they were wanted their goods to be able to be sold well in the United States without competition from goods imported from Europe. The citizens themselves were opposed to protective tariffs because they were more dependent on goods from Europe. The west was willing to support the northeast's desire for higher tariffs in exchange for the northeast's support for the development of roads and canals and ultimately railroads. It is important to understand, in an abbreviated way at least, the developments that were putting pressure on the regions.

Much of this played out in 1820, when Missouri wanted to become a state.<sup>1</sup> But Missouri raised the question of whether territories that become states will be "free" or "slave." Southern states wanted to expand and grow more cotton, and wanted to be able to take their slaves west with them. The northern states which were increasingly opposed to slavery didn't want that expansion. Furthermore, they were concerned about the balance of power between the south and the north.

You will recall that the number of senators and representatives derives from the number of states and the population. The industrial northeast at this time has a larger population than the south, so it was going to have more representation. Missouri was looking for admission as a slave state. It was southern enough to have a good climate for growing cotton. But if Missouri came in as a slave state, it would have thrown off the balance in the senate as well as representation in the house. What came out of this was the Missouri compromise, crafted by a southern senator named Henry Clay. Under the compromise, Missouri entered the union as a slave state, but Maine, which was a north-eastern property at the time, would also come into the union as a free state.

At this time, legislators drew a line at the 36/30 parallel (called the Mason-Dixon Line) extending east and west. All the land above it was to be free and all the land south of it was to be slave. A look at the map will show you that Missouri is north of the line, making Missouri the only state that was slave north of that line. But in this way, for a short time they had settled the issue of slavery.

Andrew Jackson and the removal of Native Americans. Andrew Jackson was a very controversial President in many ways. In 1824, there were four candidates for President and each region supported one. This rivalry split the vote. The 4<sup>th</sup> candidate was Andrew Jackson who actually came from the west but he was also a war hero from the war of 1812. Jackson was an ordinary, "down to earth" man. Each of the other three men got the support of only his home region. Jackson won the popular vote but, because he did not win the Electoral College,<sup>2</sup> this election went into the House of Representatives. There the House chose John Adams, who was from New England, to be the President.

John Adams was a cool, aloof man who Jackson accused of gaining a corrupt victory. Interestingly, the fact that Jackson won the popular vote but lost the election stimulated interest among the electorate and increased voting numbers, which had been small prior to this time. In 1824 the percent of Americans voting was only 24% of those eligible to vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Missouri was part of the Louisiana purchase under which President Jefferson bought large quantities of land that extended from Louisiana to Montana—many, many acres which more than doubled the size of the US.

<sup>2</sup> For a full treatment of the Electoral College, see chapter \*\*.

After the 1824 election, property requirements for voting were eliminated. The vote was still limited to white men but more white men could now participate. As a result, by 1840, 78% of the eligible voters were voting.

Jackson - in large part because he lost the election in 1824 - won in 1828. He was an interesting President in part because he used his power to appoint people to office to reward them. They call it the spoils system (or patronage) to this day. Jackson made appointments regardless of qualifications to reward friends. He also had quite a lot of parties in the White House which was a change from the previous administration which had been much more formal.

Jackson took aggressive action to remove Native Americans west of the Mississippi river in order to promote westward expansion. That of course is a tragic chapter in American history known as the "trail of tears." Many Native Americans died on the "trail of tears" because they did not have adequate food or shelter. It was also a very difficult adjustment for them once they were moved west because they were separated from their homelands and unfamiliar with the climate, the crops, the animals; virtually everything. They lost their sense of religious connection to the land because their ancestor's spirits had been left where they used to live.

Parenthetically, there were several different removals. The "trail of tears" of course is the most famous but where I live in southern Indiana, for example, some of the Cherokee tribe hid in the hills of Kentucky's Appalachian Mountains, staying there for decades. Only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did they start to reclaim their Native American identity. The Cherokee tried to blend in; many times their children did not even know that they had any Native American heritage. I have a number of such students in my classes today, many of whom are reclaiming their heritage with powwows on the campus.

Jackson is a contradictory President. For example, he thought the national bank had too much power. So he decided to weaken it by calling back all the federal money. But the bank decided to fight back by calling in its loans from the state banks. This contest fueled economic instability and created hardship for the people who suffered through a series of 19<sup>th</sup> century economic depressions. The depression of the 1830's lasted for about 5 years.

This period reflects the birth pains of the market revolution in the United States. In the meantime, new forms of transportation were spreading. Major construction of roads was begun, including a national road to link east to west. Sates (and private investors) built many canals. States borrowed great sums of money to fund the construction of canals to transport goods by water, a much faster method than hauling by horse and wagon over land.

The state of Indiana went bankrupt during this period because it invested so much in canal construction. Since it took such a long time to dig these canals, they were not finished before railroads came. Within a few short years, the railroad was able to bypass all of the canals much faster much more efficiently.

Changes in the economy and in the home. Gradually during this period, the fractious regions were growing increasingly interconnected. We began to think of ourselves as a nation as a result of improvements in transportation and single market. Periodicals were now circulating nationwide so that someone living in the western part of the country could read about what was happening in the eastern part. But this was also a very difficult time of adjustment for people.

Another major impact was on the family. Earlier, all manufacturing consisted of craftsmen working in their homes. Because of this, the whole family was involved in work. But in the 1830's and beyond, men increasingly started to leave their homes and work outside

the home. The value of work went with the men because they were bringing the money back in to the home. Even today, a housewife will often say she is “just a housewife” because there is no monetary value attached to being a housewife. Workplace changes create other changes as well. Workers have to get used to having a standardized clock; they have to get used to obeying rules. For agrarian people this is another transition.

Immigration. Immigrants who came between 1820 and 1860 were for the large part Irish, and German. Many of the new immigrants were Catholic, bringing in a whole new religious diversity. Ethnically distinct neighbourhoods grew rapidly in the urban areas, often reinforced by Catholics who would organize around a parish. German Catholics of course reinforced their cultural identity through their language.

In the 1850's, there was an emergence of a middle class in the U.S. Prior to this time there had only been the upper class and the lower class. Those in the middle might have been referred to as “middling” but were not identified as the middle class. With changes in the workplace, teachers, professionals and businessmen who identify themselves as middle class became more numerous and they wanted a better life for their children. This class supported education for their children. Women, now that they were not working outside their homes become very active in voluntary work.

If I ask my students today what class they belong to, probably everyone in the room would say they are middle class. It is interesting how it permeates the culture now.

The South and slavery. The south that emerged in the years leading up to 1840 was profoundly different than it had been earlier. The southerners perpetuated a romanticised image of themselves that emerged in the literature of the period. In the meantime, though, they were growing more and more dependent on slavery.

Even though the slave trade had been banned in the United States in 1808, it continued to grow and flourish in the United States. Slavery had become sustainable through slave reproduction.

The north, meanwhile, was complicit in slavery, even if it was ideologically opposed. Much of the nation's clothing was manufactured in the northern textile factories which of course used southern cotton. If northerners had truly opposed slavery, they would not have been engaging in this trade with the southern plantation owners. Again, the theme of an interconnected national market economy emerges.

Lives of slaves have been more closely examined recently than in the past. We now know that their food was generally adequate and consisted of a lot of meat. Especially field hands were well fed to make sure that they could work hard. Violent treatment did occur but it was the exception rather than the rule.

As an aside, during the Great Depression of the 1930's, one of the government's New Deal programs involved sending out teachers scholars and journalists to interview all the slaves who were still living in the 1930's. These interviews are available on the Internet through the Library of Congress Federal Slave Narratives. Many of the interviewers were white. But on a couple of occasions the same ex-slave was interviewed twice, once by a black interviewer and once by a white interviewer. In one interview in particular, when asked about the slaves' living conditions, the ex slave told a white interviewer that they were treated well with plenty to eat and the master was kind. But the black interviewer got the opposite story. This discrepancy shows how difficult primary sources can sometimes be. The study of slavery is also difficult because the slaves were forbidden by law to read and write. As a result, the ex-slaves' words have been filtered many times through white recorders.

There was also a free population of blacks in the south who had been given their freedom or earned their freedom in the 1700's. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became increasingly difficult for free black men in the south because the plantation owners - especially the large plantation owners - did not like the presence of free blacks. Owners feared free blacks because seeing them might encourage their slaves to want to be free as well. Free blacks could move about and farm for themselves, sell things and make money. Southerners therefore increasingly tightened restrictions on the free blacks and made it less desirable for them to live in the south. As a result, free blacks began to migrate to some of the northern states. Also, Quakers would sometimes buy slaves in the south and then move to northern states and free the slaves.

Spiritual awakening. During periods of profound social change, people often turn to religion. More religious denominations appeared in the U.S. at this time, and with that a growth in the ethos of caring. The 1830's and 40's contained tremendous reform activism, a lot of which grew out of the ideas from the great awakening. This awakening was called a moral reform movement.

The values of moral reform came from that new class of people in the middle class. They began to organize to combat drinking through temperance societies. The term "teetotaler" comes from this period, and described someone who signed a temperance pledge. Women went around with these pledges, trying to get you to sign it with a capital T. These were all voluntary societies.

Reformers also were looking at the treatment of criminals and the insane. They sought to reform jails when they saw the inhumane conditions that people suffered; they sought to help the mentally ill. At the time, remember, there was no understanding of mental illness. Patients might be chained to floors or left in their own excrement. Women started Sunday schools for Bible studies, for example.

The moral reform movement also tackled educational reform, which eventually led to public schooling. But perhaps the major subject of reform was abolitionism or the anti slavery movement. After the war of 1812 there was a growing recognition of slavery as an immoral institution. One approach was the formation of an organization called the "American Colonization Society" which proposed returning the slaves to Africa. But many African American slaves had been born in the United States and had never lived in Africa. And where would they go in Africa—which country? The anti slavery movement ran from the colonization movement to the abolitionist. The radical abolitionist wanted to abolish slavery immediately and believed that if necessary they would use force to abolish slavery. That end of the spectrum was not so popular. While many people supported an end to slavery, abolitionists were not popular and would often be tarred and feathered.

Women's rights also grew out of the 1840's. It was in 1848 that women held their first convention to talk about their lives. Their desire for reform was inspired by the declaration of independence. Elizabeth Cathy Stanton took the declaration of independence and wrote a declaration of sentiment for women modelled on the declaration of independence. Stanton asserted that women's rights were equal to men's rights and even called in 1848 for women to have the right to vote. Remember that socially and culturally this was seen as so out of the range of women's perceived roles that even the woman in attendance at the women's rights convention could not agree. In the end, it took until 1920 before women got the right to vote, though this was the beginning of that agitation.

Another thing that emerged during this period of adjustment in the 1830's and 40's was the emergence of a working class that began to organize and unite because it was losing

power as factories began to emerge. Workers when they became wage employees were at the beck and call of their employers. Workers had very long workdays, as long as 16 hours. There were no safety regulations either, at the time.

In the 1830 and 40's it was a novel idea for workers to band together and to strike, but that is what they started doing then. Sometimes their strikes were violent. Even women workers who had gone to work in the textile mills struck, once again violating what you expect a woman's role to be. In addition, tensions flared between skilled workers and unskilled workers, between the immigrants and the native born.

In any period of great change, there are a number of ways you can respond. You can pour yourself into good works. You can pour yourself into protest or you can escape. You can also withdraw from society. And from the writing of Thomas Moore's "Utopia" on, you see the existence of Utopian societies in world history. Some Utopian communities were religious in origin, including, for example, the Shakers. The Shakers were an American born religion whose name derived from their belief in the equality of men and women. Many Utopian societies were struggling to give people their rights and to treat people equally. Often, therefore, they were dealing with equality between men and women. A number of these societies eliminated the concept of marriage because they felt that it empowered men and disempowered women. Some of the communities like the Shakers abolished sex all together and became celibate. They survived by adopting orphan children. There are still 8 or 9 Shakers alive today in the United States. They are known for their distinctive architecture, their fine woodworking and their worship service which involved a lot of physical motion. In effect, they did a dance, men and women dancing separately. And since they were really committed to work, their dancing might involve things like sweeping away the dirt of sin. People would come from miles around and stand outside their churches just to look in the windows to see.

The "United Community" was different. It was the opposite of the Shakers in that they believed that every man was married to every woman and every woman was married to every man. They also believed in eugenics: scientific breeding which was somewhat popular until shortly before Hitler came to power. Once Americans became aware of the genocide in Europe in Germany, interest in eugenics went by the wayside.

Westward expansion. In the 1840's and 50's Americans believed in "manifest destiny," the idea that the hand of God ordained them to advance westwards. This belief was reinforced by missionary groups that encouraged people to go west and civilize and Christianize the place. Manifest destiny was reinforced by politicians and by business. But the frontier as a concept was a misnomer; it never was an empty place. Remember the Spanish owned much of the southwest, and Native Americans were also there. Conflict with those groups was inevitable.

The stage was also set for a clash between the Anglo Americans, some of whom thought it their right to look for economic opportunity, others who were going west to Christianize and the southerners who looked to the west as a place where they could expand slavery.

In 1849 California petitioned for statehood as a free state, once again threatening to upset the balance between slave and free states, which stood at 15 and 15. Complicating matters further, as California was getting ready to come into the union, there was also a question about what was going to happen with Utah and New Mexico. Again Henry Clay, who was known as the "great compromiser" came up with a compromise, "The Compromise of 1850" which granted California status as a free state and allow Utah and New Mexico to

decide for themselves through a grant of popular sovereignty. There were other stipulations as well, however. One of them was the strong "Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that allowed southerners to more aggressively pursue runaway slaves.

Underground Railroad. Northerners who were involved in the anti-slavery movement were committed to aiding fugitive slaves. Some would go south and bring slaves out of slavery. Harriet Tubman was very famous as a former slave who then returned to the south a number of times and brought many people out of slavery. Quakers and others opposed to slavery set up their houses as havens for the fugitive slaves. They were stationed from place to place and so the slaves could travel between them and then take shelter. This was a path for slaves to get to Canada because Canada ultimately was safe for them. There was a black Canadian population that descended from slaves. Just up the road from where I live in Indiana is a stop on the Underground Railroad called Levi Cotton House. Levi Cotton was a Quaker businessman who was committed to aiding slaves. He had over 3000 come through his house on their way to Canada. They used a feed wagon with a fake bottom in it where they put 7 or 8 slaves that they would drive from one place to the next stop on the way north. When they got to the Cotton House, the fugitive slaves would sleep on the floor of the kitchen or in the basement unless they thought someone was coming at which point they had all kinds of hiding places.

One hiding place for children was in between thick feather mattresses. They also had holes in the wall in the attic and they would open a little door so people could go in there. They could get 13 or 14 people in there at a time and cover the door with furniture.

The Underground Railroad was active in the 1840's. But the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 conveyed much harsher punishment for anyone who aided a slave. Such a person could be fined and their property confiscated. Still, many opposed to slavery continued their work on the Underground Railroad.

Making history interesting. One of the things I do to keep history "alive" and relevant to my students is to get them in the shoes of the actors in history as much as possible. To explain slavery, for example, I take students in the fall to a living history museum for what is called the "North Star experience." At eight or nine o'clock at night in November, which for us is practically winter, come rain or snow the museum staff walk you out into the middle of a field and they leave you in the dark, alone. Next, the staffers, acting as "slave traders," start verbally abusing you. They force you to get down on the ground and give you stupid tasks like moving lumber from here to there and then back again without questioning. After a time, you are given the opportunity to escape. And of course you do run, but you have no idea where you are going.

This exercise helps students imagine what it was like for fugitive slaves. Our group had resolved early to stick together and take care of each other. But when a slave hunter came with a gun and took one of the girls from our group saying "I will let you all go if I can keep her," we just took off. Even in the mere hour and a half of this exercise, you can be so conditioned by mistreatment that you cannot even look your students in the eye; you look down all the time. Experience like this helps bring history to life.

Slavery, continued. At this time, the nation's new railroad network was oriented east and west, disconnecting the north and south. At the same time, new immigrants were going to the north where the industries were located; not to the rural south. This fueled southern concerns that the north was getting more and more power.

In 1852, Harry Beacher Stowe wrote a novel about slavery called "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which I think virtually every school child in the United States reads at some point. It

was through novels (the popular culture of the day) that people were beginning to come to terms with slavery. More and more people were becoming exposed, creating more sentiment against slavery.

Around this time the Supreme Court ruled in the “Dread Scott” case that even if a slave made his way to a northern “free” state, he could not sue for his freedom. Issues like this, the Stowe book, and the Underground Railroad were kindling for the Civil War to come. The rising abolitionist movement brought men like John Brown into radical causes, one of which involved a plan to arm slaves for a mass insurrection.<sup>3</sup>

All of this culminated in the fall of 1860 with Abraham Lincoln’s election. All of the northern states voted for Lincoln, following which 7 southern states withdrew from the union. There were efforts made to reach a compromise but despite these, we ended up going to war in 1861. Once war was declared, a second wave of secession occurs, and the nation engaged for 4 years in its bloodiest war in history. More people died in the Civil War than in any other war that we’ve fought.<sup>4</sup>

The end of the war and reconstruction. In 1863, during the course of the war, Lincoln issued the emancipation proclamation. This actually freed only slaves in the south. With the conclusion of the war, the nation faced the challenge of reuniting after such a conflict. The south at this point was devastated because much of the war had been fought on their soil. General Sherman’s famous “march to the sea” had devastated a wide swathe of southern territory, freeing all the slaves in his path; there were former members of the confederacy who had to be dealt with. Reconstructing the south was far more complicated than merely saying “okay, we are one country again.” Among other challenges, the south had to be reconstructed without slavery as an institution. Our failure as a nation to deal adequately with reconstruction may be the reason that racism continued to be a major problem.

With the end of slavery a brief window of opportunity opened for ex-slaves. Slaves took new names; they legitimised marriages that had been prohibited to them before; they got education from freedmen’s schools; they were elected to serve in state legislatures; they were holding political office and taking responsibility; they were moving and creating independent lives for themselves.

Millions of freed slaves had no land and no real way to support themselves. That became one of the key issues of reconstruction. The north had the power to confiscate plantation landholdings and redistribute some of it to the freed men and freed women. There was even talk of doing that. But that approach was never implemented except in a few tiny experiments here and there. Many of the freed slaves had to become sharecroppers<sup>5</sup> and work for their former masters.

In sharecropping, though, the former plantation owners loaned money/equipment or seed to the sharecroppers, who often fell perpetually into debt. A young African American colleague of mine at Bloomington grew up on the plantation in Mississippi where her family had been slaves because her family could not escape once they became sharecroppers.

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<sup>3</sup> Brown and his compatriots seized a Federal arsenal near Washington DC in order to provide arms to this rebellion, but failed. He was executed shortly thereafter.

<sup>4</sup> In all, 498,333 Americans lost their lives from battle death and disease. Around 200,000 African Americans served in the Union Army, and approximately 40,000 African American soldiers died fighting in the conflict.

<sup>5</sup> A system of labor in which the farmer “leases” farmland with his or her own labor, sharing the crop with the landholder upon harvest.



Eventually, different plans for reconstruction were tried and failed and what remained was a military occupation of the south. Once the troops were withdrawn, though, whites sought a return to “white supremacy” by enacting black codes. Reconstruction marked the emergence of a hate organization known as the Ku Klux Klan. This group, through intimidation, tried to keep African Americans “in their place.”

The rise of industry. Over the course of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the country experienced a significant wave of industrial growth. A convergence of a number of factors spurred that growth, from abundant natural resources to an entrepreneurial society. One example of this entrepreneurialism was Andrew Carnegie, who became the richest man in America by founding a steel empire. A number of other entrepreneurs like him also arose at this time. They became known as either “robber barons” or “captains of industry” depending on whether they were viewed as exploiting their workers in order to become fabulously rich or as leading citizens of their country who gave huge endowments to found libraries, museums and schools. They did both things, of course, but people tended to view them as one or the other.

Because of immigration to this country we had a massive pool of skilled workers; we had good harvests; we had government policies that supported industry. All of this worked together to produce tremendous industrial growth. Of course, there were also dark chapters. Lack of workplace safety regulations meant that many children had to work – even under the age of 12, in coal mines and elsewhere that adults couldn’t. When machines broke down in factories, the foremen would use small children to go in and make the repairs because their fingers were tiny.

A response to these practices was the growth in labor organizations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A number of strikes during this period became quite violent. The tensions playing out in the factories represented workers and owners trying to assert authority over the workplace.

The industrialists of that era found justification for what they were doing in the ideas of Herbert Spencer, a British thinker. Spencer had adapted the ideas of Charles Darwin to society, outlining what he called “social Darwinism” embodying the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest. Many wealthy industrialists of this era struggled with the wealth they accumulated and, like Carnegie, put much of their wealth to noble purposes.

The end of the frontier and a new imperative. In around 1890, an historian named Frederick Jackson Turner published a book called “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” In it, Turner postulated that the American frontier no longer existed for American society, having reached a population density of more than two people living per square mile. Turner believed the frontier played a major role in the continuing renewal of American democracy.

Reaching the limit of the frontier had other consequences as well. This is the point at which the isolationism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the 1890’s gives way to a more international view. Prior to this period, America was focused on what was happening at home. But with the end of the frontier, we began to realize we couldn’t expand anymore. Where would our markets be? Where would resources come from? In 1898 we embarked on our first war that involved people other than our own: the Spanish American War.

This war represented a significant shift for us because our policy since our second President, John Quincy Adams, had warned against American entanglement in others’ affairs. Adams believed we should avoid entanglement in foreign relations because it would involve the US beyond the power of extrication in wars of interest and intrigue.

President William McKinley, who was President during the Spanish American War, Theodore Roosevelt, who fought in the Spanish American War, and Woodrow Wilson, who was President during World War I, believed that the US had to end its isolationism and to exercise international influence. New questions arose: should, for example, the US become an imperial power or should it fight to eradicate colonialism? Should it promote stability and the status quo or should it promote democracy? Should it speak softly and carry a big stick or should it exercise moral diplomacy? These were issues that American Presidents and Congress were starting to deal with at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

All these elements are connected. The closing of the frontier connects us to industrialisation and our need for world markets and raw materials. Internally, we saw great divisions in our country like the divide between rich and poor. There was division between farmers and factory workers who were unsure of their status. There were gender differences, tensions between the native born and immigrants; there were racial tensions. With the new challenges, there was a new generation of leaders standing in the wings, fearful of the schisms but confident that they can bridge them. Theodore Roosevelt, who was President at the turn of the century said “To the leaders of the past, you and your generation have had your chance. Now let us of this generation have ours.”

### **South African reflection by Prof Nicholas Southey, UNISA**

**PROF SOUTHEY:** Joanne’s presentation was wonderful. And the skill with which she captured some of the complexity and the diversity of America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is really to be admired. Anyone in the South African audience should be having all sorts of bells ringing very loudly. Nation. Slavery. Frontier. Change. Reconstruction. Racism. Land. Rich and poor. Economic opportunity. From a South African perspective, all of these have very powerful resonance and echoes.

I am terribly uncomfortable making historical comparisons which lose the contexts of one or either society. But I think it is a very good way of getting into this kind of material into a classroom situation. It is a good way to attract students to American studies.

David Cohen wrote a book some years ago called “Chasing The Red And Blue” in which he retraces the journey of Alexis de Tocqueville who in the 1830’s wrote a book called “Democracy in America.” Tocqueville travelled in the regions that Joanne was talking about: the northeast, the northwest, the south. He captured the narrative of America from a European perspective. Tocqueville stressed that what really united America was not so much the individual pursuit of happiness or the individual pursuit of liberty, it was the pursuit of wealth. Wealth was really the kind of equalizing thing. Another thing that he identified about the United States and that emerged very strongly in Joanne’s presentation was the issue of religion. It struck Tocqueville that he wasn’t aware of any other society with the possible exception of Ireland in which religion played such a profound role in public and private life.

I didn’t really get a sense of negativity out of Joanne’s presentation. [America] is a society which is often characterized as being the great success; a place where you would fulfil your dreams. To some extent that was one ingredient in the enormous immigration boom that took place in the United States after the civil war up to the 1920’s. After the 1880’s a great immigration boom fueled tremendous industrial growth. Part of the reason people came was of course to escape conditions in their own societies but to try to buy into this new emerging international power.

Joanne spoke a great deal about volunteerism, community, that age of reform. I do think that process is a very ambiguous one. It was certainly imbued with a great deal of optimism and faith in human nature and the sort of notion that every individual could achieve something. This whole romantic ideal which to some extent flew in the face of Calvinist values that human instincts were inherently sinful, lending a contradictory impulse through the whole century.

Out of this [ambiguity] came a desire for order, for control [over] how to channel all these different emerging tensions which people of the time were experiencing. So there is a yearning for stability, for restoration of more conservative values along with a conservative nostalgia running through at least significant segments of society. This comes through most particularly in the south but it is not alien to the north either.

Another way [to get a view] into these kind of dilemmas is through the literature of the society that you are studying. I'd just like to mention very briefly that some of the novels that emerged before the 1850's anyway could certainly be used in a kind of Americans studies program or getting into American history. Joanne referred to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on slavery. Another is *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville's famous novel; a very thick book admittedly quite intimidating perhaps but a great story and a way of capturing quite a lot about the struggle of human will against stronger forces. There are others. Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* illustrates the danger of any individual cutting himself or herself off from society. Where should individualism end and community kick in?

Issues of slavery are sometimes forgotten. Certainly when I was at school it was barely mentioned that South Africa was a slave society and that slavery had been a labor system in this country up to the 1830's. The comparative situation could be used extremely well in engaging students on issues of slavery and on the kinds of things that Joanne referred to. One could look at in a comparative context to what extent were slaves well treated in either society.

One could also talk at great length about the frontier situation [in both countries]. In the American west there was a sense of a continent being opened up to progress and civilization – Christianity and manifest destiny. I don't think Europeans had it quite so easy in the Eastern Cape situation at all. The Eastern Cape from the 1770's through to the 1870's experienced a whole century of conflict. The northern frontiers of the expanding Cape colony were very much more fluid and [full of] turmoil and uncertainty. You have an expanding market economy infringing very profoundly in indigenous societies. A whole rich kind of comparative base could be made. The issue of reconstruction after a period of great civil conflict of tremendous divisiveness [is another example]. Joanne referred to the "failure" of reconstruction and I suppose the South African new nation is still very much in its early phases. But reconstruction failed or can be said to fail in 1877 a mere decade, 12 years, after the end of the Civil War. We're kind of there now. '94 South Africa was the end of a period of tremendous civil conflict where a society certainly was on the brink of tearing itself apart completely. I don't think we're quite there. This is where comparisons can become indeed very fatuous...but things do emerge about racism.

How do you deal with a situation of tremendous inequality and how do you begin to rebuild a society? Reconstruction failed for various complicated reasons in the United States – a failure to address the issue of race head on. Some things were pretty firmly embedded in the United States by the 1860's and practices that were long entrenched over a century were very hard to dislodge. People bought into the constitution and there was unwillingness on the part of leadership at the time to infringe on the rights of states [and] the rights of individuals. [What remained was] profound respect for private property and for free enterprise. Economic

privilege was not seriously assaulted. Also there remained a pervasive belief that black people were inferior - even amongst more liberal kinds of people - and it took another century to address that set of issues.

Now in the South African situation, black people themselves have been able to insert themselves far more into the debates on those kinds of issues. The kind of issues South Africans grapple with today are economic ones. To what extent do you address issues of dispossession of land while respecting private property rights that have become entrenched over a whole period of colonialism, segregation and apartheid?

I think around issues of slavery, around issues of frontier, and around issues of reconstruction people based in the Southern tip of Africa have quite good handles to get into another society. Where the issues are different to some extent, where population imbalances are very different, where the ethnic mix is very different common kinds of questions can begin to be explored and I think very fruitfully indeed.

### **Question and answer session.**

QUESTION: Professor Southey defined “conservative religious values” as being at odds with change in the age of reform... would you elaborate? And, has America apologised for slavery?

SOUTHEY: I’m not trying to characterize this as a period in which society constantly goes back to its [roots] or can’t move on from its conservative roots. The second awakening is a whole new influx which brings in a much wider sense of community engagement and renewal. In the American context in the 1830’s and 1840’s you start having an impulse towards individual exploration. Up in Massachusetts, for instance, the “Walden Pond” movement is a sort of withdrawal from society and an effort to create a kind of an ideal sort of life; of the individual challenging himself to live as simply as possible. However I do also think that religion is quite a conservative force in that it tends to operate on certain defined lines.

The Shakers, the Mormons, the more mainstream kind of churches, and so forth were reacting strongly against that kind of individuality. Religion in some contexts can be a great vehicle for challenging order. Again it depends on the contexts. In America, in Latin America, [and] in South Africa, religion is taken and completely turned over. It’s a new kind of ideology which is not conservative. It is a very challenging, very radicalizing kind of force.

PROF PASSET: I think the comments about how religion is a collective impulse versus an “individual” one are really important. While the collective movement is democratizing for many of the participants, there is this peak of activity that is very democratizing and then it settles back into a more conservative mode. But with that collective impulse comes a trend towards conformity. So it’s a little bit of both there.

President Clinton did make an apology to the slaves about slavery but obviously it hasn’t become a serious issue of reparations

QUESTION: My first question is if you look at African countries today one of the major challenges is cementing and consolidating new democracies. In the history of the United States that you have put before us today, the U.S. is a new democracy founded in a very unstable environment. There were very strong opposing currents to representative forms of government, for instance the formation of the holy alliance which wanted to wipe out

representative government. What lessons can we get from this as Africans? How does the United States cement its democracy within the context of a very hostile environment? Maybe that would teach us some lessons for our emerging democracy in the African continent.

The second question pertains to those of us who teach history. From your presentation today, one could sense quite a number of contradictions which need explanations. If you look at the campaign for independence in the United States, for example, one would assume that it was a struggle against the institution of colonialism and, to [an] extent, a revolt against the empire. But later developments show the U.S. involved in a war with Mexico in the 1840's. The U.S. is grabbing territory in Texas, California, Arizona, and Utah. They are engaging in an empire. The very process we assume independence was meant to nullify. How do you explain that contradiction in a classroom situation?

PROF PASSET: Regarding the first question on cementing a new democracy in an unstable environment, it is possible that [this brief history session makes it] look more unstable than it was. First, Americans did believe in representative government. The question really was, did they believe in it having more control at a state level or a federal level? In some ways that is a healthy tension that would play out over time. But, despite the differences in economic status, social status, [and] political status, Americans still had core values like the belief in the possibility of bettering yourself and the belief in equality, both of which I think are really important. People believe it even if they don't always experience it. As long as people believe in that and believe in the constitution, and the bill of rights, all of these help hold us together.

SOUTHEY: I do think that the process of trying to define a new society is precisely predicated on a point where everybody - or at least the great majority - buys into the new order. In the American case perhaps it hasn't maybe come through quite so strongly in today's presentation. There is also, though, a whole sense of an evolving law; of an evolving constitution. For example, while one talks about the "failure of reconstruction," you do have the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments which stand on the statute books and which were used as a basis I think in the 1950's and 60's as creating this more equal society. Even if they weren't implemented in practice on the ground immediately, there is a sense that the great majority of people buy into this society [and] into the issues of commonality that are there.

PROF PASSET: I am thinking a little more about the whole emphasis on the failure of reconstruction and I think that it is something that I have to qualify because, you know, I was running short on time but while I see reconstruction as a failure in some respects, there is also the reconstruction amendment, there is the Civil Rights Act of 1858. We did come back together as a country. We still found that we were able to come back together after a civil war and move on and become very industrialized.

That feeds into the second part of your question which has to do with explaining contradictions. There is no doubt when you are teaching any kind of history you're going to find that there are all kinds of contradictions, especially if you are teaching the history from multiple perspectives. The important things are that you have adequate amount of time and that you tell the different stories that are part of history. My goal is to give the students [the chance] to think for themselves; to engage in critical thinking. I try to present as much as we know about history, give them the primary documents then to allow them to start making their own conclusions. In my role as a facilitator of discussions, I can question them. But my

goal is not to get the students to memorize history, rather it is to explore the contradictions and then understand the relevance of those contradictions today. [I] try to get a connection from the past to the present. Another thing I do is to have students translate documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> century into today's language. You could even get them to convert them into rap songs or hip hop. Whatever they connect to helps them get the essence of it.